PERSUASION

published by
PERSUASION, INC.
260 west 86 street, n.y.c.

35¢

JOAN KENNEDY TAYLOR, EDITOR

distributed by the
Metropolitan Young Republican Club

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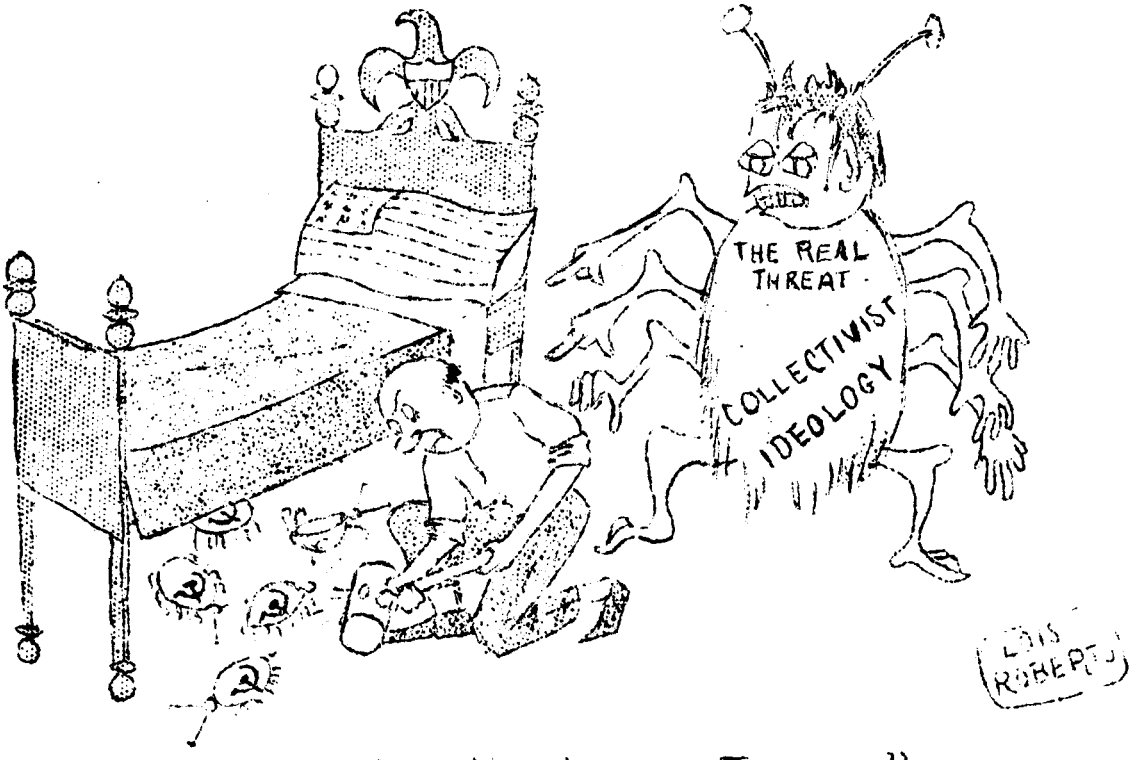
Volume II, No. 9 September, 1965

V I E W S



"The longer he takes, the bigger I grow"

A RED UNDER EVERY BED

". . . and in Vietnam, THEY have given orders that only one span of any bridge be destroyed in bombing runs over North Vietnam. THEY have their reasons. . ."

"THEY are slowing us down in our new weapons development. They are hamstringing our space program, right within our own defense department."

"Do you know what THEY are doing in Washington right now? THEY are betraying us. We must stop THEM."

I recently was invited to attend a chapter meeting of the John Birch Society. I went. The meeting was quiet, polite, and earnest. The above remarks were said quietly, politely, and earnestly, with only the slightest inflection on the word THEY.

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Who are THEY? Robert Welch, founder and leader of the John Birch Society* identifies them both in general and in particular in his many writings. In The Blue Book** he says, "Our immediate and most urgent anxiety, of course, is the threat of the Communist Conspiracy." He grants an all-pervading power and success to this conspiracy. As he evaluates it, "There has been brilliant control and coordination, by central authority, of the efforts of millions of men. . . . As a result of this forty years of cumulative effort, the conspiracy is now incredibly well organized. It is so well financed that it has billions of dollars annually just to spend on propaganda. . . . This octopus is so large that its tentacles now reach into all of the legislative halls, all of the union labor meetings, a majority of the religious gatherings, and most of the schools of the entire world." (Italics his.)

Who have been members of this conspiracy? In The Politician, Welch names a few illustrious names. (Let me state that nowhere does he prove that any of these men are in fact Communists.***) Roosevelt's aide, Harry Hopkins, "was one of the most successful Communist agents the Kremlin has ever found already planted in the American government." (pages 217-18) George Catlett Marshall, Eisenhower's superior in World War II and later Secretary of State under Truman, "has been a conscious, deliberate, dedicated agent of the Soviet conspiracy." (page 15) On page 223 he says of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under Eisenhower, "I personally believe Dulles to be a Communist agent. . . ." As for Eisenhower himself, Welch states at the end of The Politician (written while Eisenhower was President) ". . . we have a Communist, or a politician who serves their purposes every bit as well, sitting in the chair of the President of the United States." (page 300)

Robert Welch maintains that we are facing a crisis, "the actual take-over of this country from the inside, by the Communists." The John Birch Society is not the only proponent of this theory by any means. Many groups, labeled as "right-wing" or "extremist," share little beside their adherence to this fear. One example, which makes Welch and his Society seem restrained, is that of the Minutemen, a paramilitary group in the Midwest who actually train in the field for the day when the only resistance to THEM will be a guerrilla underground.

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*For a general statement on the history and nature of the John Birch Society, see "Who and What is the John Birch Society?" by Elenore Boddy, Persuasion, March 1965.

**By Robert Welch. This book is the operating manual of the Society.

***See Joan Kennedy Taylor's review of The Politician in Persuasion, March 1965, for an evaluation of Robert Welch's use of argument and his process of proof.

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"All the media of mass communications are effectively controlled by the enemy. . . . Even if we could awaken enough Americans to the true facts and get out the vote for a really patriotic candidate we must expect from past lessons that those votes would be stolen," says a pamphlet entitled A Short History of the Minutemen. The conclusion is to get out one's gun, because "it is no longer possible for the American people to change their government's policies by normal democratic processes."* Notice that the Minutemen are apparently not arming against foreign invasion--the clear implication is that they are preparing to do battle with their fellow-Americans in order to change government policies.

For both the John Birch Society and the Minutemen, the dominant theme is the presence of an "enemy," a THEY that is omnipowerful, omnipresent, all-knowing. Over a period of decades, a vast network, described by Welch as "incredibly cunning and extensive," has always had someone there to make a fateful decision, to write the crucial books, to run the important elections, to make the focal speeches, to sabotage the vital policies; never failing, never wrong. This conspiracy is seen as literally creating the present-day world.

This absolute faith in the power and majesty of the Communist Conspiracy is shared by many within the spectrum of American right-wing political opinion. This idea, which might be termed the Conspiracy Theory, is used as the automatic explanation of the causes of virtually everything they see as wrong--the Civil Rights movement, the growing power of government, inflation, the defeat of Barry Goldwater, the United Nations, water fluoridation, Supreme Court decisions.

Just what is the Conspiracy Theory? It is a theory of contemporary political history which holds that current events can only be understood by hypothesizing a vast, interrelated, secret network of persons in high and low places in government, the communications media, the arts, the schools, and the churches who are consciously working for the establishment of communism and who are under central direction or control.

A corollary to this theory is the idea that the cure for most of this nation's (and the world's) political problems would be the unmasking of the persons in this conspiracy and their punishment and/or neutralization.

Today, this theory and its corollary are the bread and butter of a host of professional anti-Communists who preach it with evangelical fervor. Without this theory, these anti-Communists would be left with nothing more gripping to utter than

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*from Principles of Guerrilla Warfare published by the Minutemen, Norborne, Missouri.

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some truisms about God, the Flag, the Founding Fathers, the sanctity of the Constitution, and the need to get back to the old-fashioned American virtues. With it, they have a message, a torch to carry on high, a cry of outrage and fear with which to beckon to thousands upon thousands of outraged and fearful Americans. With tones and intensities reminiscent of an old-time preacher predicting the coming of world ruin through the secret presence among us of the devil's agents, belief in the theory is called for--and all who do not believe are damned.

That is all it is--a belief, an act of faith. To hold the Conspiracy Theory does not require thought, only some special sense of communism and Communists. Robert Welch put it that he has a very good "nose" for Communists. Whenever one asks why someone is doing something, one does not use one's reasoning faculty, one goes to one's nose. Feeling provides the answer, which is automatic: the Conspiracy is doing it. So-and-so is a Communist; he must be, because I feel it. No more need be asked; no further answer is required.

To hold the Conspiracy Theory is to hold a position with disastrous ideological consequences.

Let us say someone takes a position distasteful to you. Has anything been said about this position when you claim he is a Communist, or a Communist dupe? Is it supposed to be automatic that the mere label, "Communist," is enough to refute the position, is enough to damn it, that no further argument is necessary? How far does it get you against his arguments when he details the ideals he serves and the political ends he hopes to gain through the application of certain political and moral principles? Even if he is a Communist, his argument must be answered. If <u>all</u> you've been is anti-Communist, your opponent is your intellectual superior and deserves to carry the day--and he will.

If your opponent wins in this way, you have helped him to do so. You have exposed your position to an attack from which there is no defense. For you are in one of two situations: either you have accused someone of being Communist and in fact he is a Communist and you have not sought to refute him, which in effect grants him his argument; or you have accused someone of being a Communist and he is not a Communist. In this case, you have committed an injustice which will be used to weaken the position of all who would oppose communism through a reasoned argument that is aimed against the values, ideals, and promises of communism and collectivism in general.*

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*For a further discussion of this area, see "Who's Right?" by Joan Kennedy Taylor, <u>Persuasion</u>, February 1965.

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Yet this is not the worst consequence that comes from holding this theory. A more damaging aspect is the assumption that it isn't ideas which must be countered by ideas, but rather men who must be identified and destroyed. This is not to say that conspiracy theorists do not also utter ideas about freedom and rights and the nature of a republic; but that they only utter them--ideology, the product and operation of reason, is not their core animus. For them it is not thought that will save the political institutions of man, it is action against evildoers.

The Conspiracy Theory is profoundly anti-intellectual. Its focus is upon nonideational man working in a gang, who must be answered by the opposition of another gang. Instead of good and bad principles, understanding the world becomes a matter of identifying the good guys and the bad guys.

The alternative to supporting this theory does not require that we hold that no conspirators exist. They do. Communists do get together secretly. These secret groups often are led and staffed by men trained in the Soviet Union or other Communist nations. Many times these groups are financed by Moscow or Peking. All of this has been demonstrated by direct evidence again and again. There is little doubt that there are such conspirators in this country today--one or more of them may be in high position in the U.S. government. Nor am I claiming that there is no value in the unmasking of Communist spies. They are indeed a danger, but rooting them out is essentially a police operation. The argument that I hope to demonstrate here is that when one is concerned with an educational operation rather than a policing one, what is important is to identify the errors in an idea, not merely to identify who said it.

Where the intellectual mistake comes is in granting basic, fundamental efficacy to conspiracy. To hold the Conspiracy Theory (that is, to hold that Communists the world over, in a network that is centrally directed, have been the prime movers and shapers of the world for three or four generations) is to grant to the conspirators a prime ability to initiate and sustain wide-range, fundamental socio-political effects of and by themselves. If this were so, the successors of Al Capone would be ruling the U.S. today.

There is only one thing that makes conspiracy even seem to be efficacious, and that is when the ideas held by a culture's established intellectuals, government leaders, and other major figures appear to serve the ends of conspirators.

The political scientist who is a moral relativist (while heatedly deploring totalitarian aspects of Communist governments) will write books on the necessity for some nation or other to go through a Communist phase. The pragmatist, holding no principle to be absolute, no knowledge to be "fixed and immutable," will admit there was a day when individualism and private rights were important, but that day has passed; now men in "underdeveloped nations" and in "underprivileged classes" must gain their identity within groups, must learn to submerge a portion of individ-

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ual liberty to fulfill the destiny of the group. The Marxist, in principle, with close argument, attacks the structure of faith proposed as the ultimate prop under capitalism and declares that with faith gone the whole system of rights and individual ownership of the means of production has no basis in principle and thus we have no right to stand in the way of the "scientific future of man," which he characterizes as a future based not in faith but in reason.

Does holding the Conspiracy Theory answer any of these positions? It does not, any more than calling a man a fool proves the man to be foolish. We live in a culture whose intellectuals can't intellectually defend themselves against totalitarian collectivism. All they and the nation's private and public leaders can do is to agree with Communist ideals while deploring Communist practices. Today the general ideal expressed in the arts and communications media is that of collectivized man. Can espousing the Conspiracy Theory even touch the causes, even begin the process of identifying and spreading the ideas that can refute the principles of collectivism? It cannot, because it is not an idea; it is a feeling, and how one feels about something simply is not evidence about the thing.

Today there is a chorus of support for collectivism which makes it seem there is conspiracy where in fact there is only a sick culture. We are not dying at the hands of conspirators; we are committing suicide. It is not a change of gangs in Washington or any place else that will save us; it is a change of ideas.

--David J. Dawson

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R E V I E W S

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

The Age of the Moguls, by Stewart H. Holbrook
Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953

America is characterized in the minds of people all over the world as the "land of opportunity," where one's struggle for success is rewarded by prosperity and riches. All one needs is ambition, a willingness for hard work, and the ability to see an opportunity and grasp it. It is the great American Dream--and it was once a reality.

It's all part of history now--a history that most people have forgotten and which has been distorted by many different interpretations. The Age of the Moguls brings to life the men who created the great golden legend--the industrialists, bankers, and entrepreneurs of the nineteenth century, the so-called "robber barons"--and captures the sweep and color of the age that spans a hundred years, during which most of the great fortunes of this country were made and the foundations of American industry were begun.

Over fifty famous--and infamous--men are presented in this book, and their lives and careers are told in an exciting narrative by Mr. Holbrook. Vanderbilt, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, Drew, Fisk, Harriman, Du Pont, Morgan, Mellon, Gould, Frick, Schwab, Swift, Guggenheim, Hearst--these were only a few of the moguls. Most of them were self-made men, and those who inherited their wealth multiplied it many times over during their lifetimes.

Mr. Holbrook is not a philosopher or even an historian; he is a journalist. And herein lies the book's virtue and its flaw. Virtue, because he does present the story of the era; flaw, because he does not attempt an intellectual analysis of the period or of the men, but almost by default gives just as erroneous an interpretation of these men as their severest critics. Some of the moguls are characterized by Mr. Holbrook as "builders"--those who created and expanded industry. Others are characterized as "destroyers"--those who desolated every enterprise they touched. Unfortunately, Mr. Holbrook does not seem to think the distinction between a "builder" and a "destroyer" is too important. The reader who considers such a distinction crucial is warned that he will have to disentangle this issue himself, with no help from Mr. Holbrook. He writes: "My account will not attempt to pass judgments on matters that have baffled moralists, economists, and historians. I happen to believe that no matter how these men accumulated their fortunes, their total activities were the greatest influence in bringing the United States to its present incomparable position in the world of business and industry." He unmistakably admires these men--all of them--and thereby puts the "builders" among them on the same level as the "destroyers."

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The Age of the Moguls begins with the first great mogul of American capital and industry, Cornelius Vanderbilt, commonly called the Commodore, a nickname he earned in his early years as owner of a fleet of trading ships. At the age of seventeen, Vandervilt borrowed one hundred dollars from his mother to buy a barge. At age twenty-three, he had earned ten thousand dollars transporting cargo by sailing schooner along the coast. He continued to expand his shipping interests until, by the end of the Civil War, he had amassed twenty million dollars. Vanderbilt then turned his attention to railroads, created the New York Central--and began a thirty-year war with "the men of disaster," Daniel Drew, Jay Gould, and Jim Fisk.

The war began between Vanderbilt and Drew; Drew owned controlling interest in the Erie Railroad, which was in competition with Vanderbilt's New York Central. "It was as obvious to Commodore Vanderbilt," Mr. Holbrook writes, "as it was to less shrewd men that Drew was not interested in the Erie Railroad as a transportation system. It was a piece of property to be manipulated for his own profit. From the day he became a heavy stockholder, he had by various means caused flurries, then depressions in its shares, taking his gains with each fluctuation." Vanderbilt set out to buy control of the Erie, and Drew hired Gould and Fisk to help him wage the war. "The struggle, which went into the history of crime and of finance as the 'Erie War,' was like nothing before or since..." Mr. Holbrook says, and gives a colorful account of the conflict in which he implies that every means available--legal and illegal--was used by both sides. (Gould alone paid approximately one million dollars to get an act passed that allowed the Erie to sell unlimited issues of Erie stock.) Which side was right? Was there a significant difference between the tactics of "builder" and "destroyer"? Mr. Holbrook does not say.

Eventually Vanderbilt "tired of the Erie War." He had lost more than a million dollars. Drew was ousted from control by Gould and Fisk, who proceeded to loot the Erie "with the help of the easily corruptible legislatures of only two stats, New York and New Jersey." As for the Erie, Holbrook writes, "during the Drew-Fisk-Gould administrations, its funded debt had risen by sixty-four million dollars. It was left so crippled with this enormous load that the line did not pay a penny of dividends on its common stock for another sixty-nine years."

Writing of Drew, Fisk, and Gould, Mr. Holbrook states: "It would be difficult to find three men more dissimilar from each other than these. No one of them quite fits the character of the American mogul of business or industry. They were shrewd enough and ruthless enough; but unlike Commodore Vanderbilt and the great industrialists who followed him, such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, Hill, and a few more, these three smart men were not builders of anything. Many called them wreckers."

His reluctance to evaluate the actions of his protagonists gives Mr. Holbrook even more trouble when he tries to present a clear picture of "The most reviled and in many respects the greatest of American moguls," John D. Rockefeller, Sr. At

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age sixteen, Rockefeller went to Cleveland to work for $3.50 a week in a commission house. At eighteen, he launched the commission firm of Clark and Rockefeller. Rockefeller invested "a few thousand dollars" in a small oil refinery and soon after sold his interest in the commission house to devote his full energies to the oil refining business. By the time he was thirty-eight years old, he and his associates had created the first American trust, Standard Oil, which controlled, according to Mr. Holbrook, "ninety-five per cent of the pipe lines and refineries in the United States."

The Standard Oil Trust is one of the most controversial subjects in the history of business, and was the main target of the first antitrust legislation. Mr. Holbrook gives a broad picture of it rather than a detailed one. Rockefeller "craved order and efficiency," writes Mr. Holbrook, and proceeded to buy up the competitors in the oil refining field. Many of the major industries in America were developed along the lines of Standard Oil, and all have been objects of attacks on the grounds of"ruthlessness," "stealing," and "unfair competition." But Rockefeller "emerged the great whipping boy of capital....He became and remained until his death, half a century later, the favorite ogre of the United States."

Although Rockefeller was branded as "ruthless," Mr. Holbrook also notes that "John Rockefeller admired anything that worked efficiently. Never in his long life, it is said, did he destroy a really successful business." In keeping with Mr. Holbrook's point of view, he does not separate the issues of honesty and dishonesty, ruthlessness and efficiency; nor does he indicate the economic advantages of Rockefeller's methods. Again the distinction between "builder" and "destroyer" is blurred.

By this time in the growth of American industry, the spectre of government interference in economics was becoming a solid reality, and labor unions were gaining more and more power. Holbrook states: "The bright serene noon of their [the American moguls] days began to pass in 1877. From then onward, capitalists and industrialists of all degree had to use more ingenuity than before. They had to fight harder. They were watched more closely. They were harassed infinitely more...." The moguls were never again free to work their wonders "without protest from labor, criticism from the public, and harassment by government."

But it was not the end of "miracles" by the captains of industry. Henry Ford changed the concept of transportation with the launching of his Model T automobile. Ford announced, "I will build a motorcar for the great multitude." And he priced it so low that in the next nineteen years he produced and sold fifteen million Model T's. Holbrook writes: "Ford had nothing to do with inventing the internal combustion engine, or even with the assembly-line method of manufacture, which was already old when Ford was born. What he did was take both the invention and the method and tinker them into near perfection. He did more than that. His theory in regard to wages...created, or rather forced a new philosophy that Ford's contemporary manufacturers found hard to accept."

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Ford's philosophy was, Holbrook says, "that the wage earner is more important as a consumer than as a producer." Quoting Ford, "Industry must manage to keep wages high and prices low. Otherwise it will limit the number of its customers. One's own employees should be one's own best customers."

Ford's wage scale was based on a minimum of five dollars a day, eight hours a day. This was in a period when millions of people were happy to work nine hours for two dollars. Thousands of men poured into Detroit, and Ford had his pick of the best of the labor force. In 1928 it was estimated that half a million men and women were dependent, directly or indirectly, on the Ford Motor Company for employment. Profits during the first twenty-five years of the company were one billion dollars.

When Ford attempted to turn some of the profits back into the business, the stockholders went to court, attempting to force Ford into distributing the company's earnings, and to halt the hundred-million-dollar expansion program that was proposed. At the trial, Ford shocked the public by his philosophy, saying, "After they [the employees] have had their wages and a share of the profits, it is my duty to take what remains and put it back into the industry to create more work for more men at higher wages." To Ford, Holbrook says, this was neither generosity nor conscience but just good business. Ford lost his case, and, as a result, resigned as president of Ford Motor Company.

Mr. Holbrook draws no conclusion from this event; he does not even guess at Ford's motive for rebelling--if in fact he sees it as a rebellion. Again, his lack of judgment and analysis is apparent. His presentation of Ford is perhaps the clearest example one could have of a "builder," if the term has any meaning at all. And yet he compares Ford to Daniel Drew in the following way: "Now and again Ford was glad to meet the press and to hint mysteriously at what he might be thinking about. It is here that Ford appears to have adopted the foxy ways of Uncle Daniel Drew and other early masters of capital. For a moment, indeed, Ford becomes almost indistinguishable from Drew and Gould and Vanderbilt. He told the inquiring reporters that nobody, not even he, Henry Ford, has as yet built a really good automobile. He had half a mind, he said, to start a new company, a concern with no stockholders to harass him."

Toward the end of The Age of the Moguls Mr. Holbrook mourns: "Given another hundred years or so and the actual accomplishments of the mogul class may well be forgotten save by historians; and if their names survive otherwise, it will be through their bequests in the fields of art, literature, science, and education, matters they largely scorned in their heyday." Mr. Holbrook has succeeded in capturing the excitement of the age, but he has done little to make these men memorable in terms of their motives, and he has at times obscured their accomplishments. He has avoided judging them, but his almost Nietzschean view of them is maintained throughout and cannot but color his narrative. He writes: "Most of them were well paid for their fearsome energy, but I cannot bring myself to believe they were moved

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solely by the profit motive. They wanted profits, of course, and got them. But there was something else. I am naive enough to think their tremendous drive came from the same source that drove Genghis Khan and Napoleon Bonaparte."

Mr. Holbrook deplores the passing of this class of men. He has written of them with excitement and color. With the writing of this book he has done much to bring the age to life--but he has not helped to preserve their memory by his erroneous interpretation of their motives. It's very nice to read an account of these "builders" by someone who admires them. But on the other hand--with a friend like this, who needs an enemy?

--Elenore Boddy

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